What is Claimed:

1. A composition comprising a silica xerogel comprising between 0.2 and 1.0 mmol/g of a metal component, wherein said metal component comprises at least one alkali metal in an amount between 0.2 mmol/g and 1.0 mmol/g, the xerogel having a pH between 8.0 and 10.5.

2. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel comprises between 0.3 and 0.8 mmol/g of the metal component.

3. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel comprises between 0.4 and 0.7 mmol/g of the metal component.

4. The composition of claim 1, wherein the at least one alkali metal is sodium.

5. The composition of claim 1, wherein the at least one alkali metal is potassium.

6. The composition of claim 1, wherein the pH of the xerogel is between 8.5 and 10.0.

7. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel is an acid-set xerogel.

8. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel is an alkaline-set xerogel.

9. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel is a calcined xerogel.

10. The composition of claim 1, wherein the xerogel is a hydrothermally treated xerogel.

11. The composition of claim 1, wherein the metal component further comprises at least one alkaline earth metal.

12. The composition of claim 11, wherein the xerogel comprises less than 0.1 mmol/g in total of said at least one alkaline earth metal.

13. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel comprises between 0.3 and 0.8 mmol/g of the metal component.

14. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel comprises between 0.4 and 0.7 mmol/g of the metal component.

15. The composition of claim 12, wherein said at least one alkali metal is sodium.

16. The composition of claim 12, wherein said at least one alkali metal is potassium.

17. The composition of claim 12, having a pH between 8.5 and 10.0.

18. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel is an acid-set xerogel.

19. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel is an alkaline-set xerogel.

20. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel is a calcined xerogel.

21. The composition of claim 12, wherein the xerogel is a hydrothermally treated xerogel.

22. The composition of claim 11, wherein:

the xerogel is a hydrothermally treated xerogel comprising less than 0.1 mmol/g in total of said at least one alkaline earth metal;

the xerogel comprises between 0.4 and 0.7 mmol/g of the metal component;

said at least one alkali metal is sodium; and

the pH is between 8.5 and 10.0.

23. A method for treating beer comprising contacting the beer with a composition comprising a silica xerogel comprising between 0.2 and 1.0 mmol/g of a metal component, wherein said metal component comprises at least one alkali

metal in an amount between 0.2 mmol/g and 1.0 mmol/g, the xerogel having a pH between 8.0 and 10.5.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the metal component further comprises at least one alkaline earth metal.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein the xerogel comprises less than 0.1 mmol/g in total of said at least one alkaline earth metal.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the xerogel comprises between 0.3 and 0.8 mmol/g of the metal component.

27. A method of making a silica xerogel comprising the steps of:

a) contacting an aqueous alkali metal silicate with an amount of an aqueous mineral acid sufficient to neutralize between 70% and 95% of the alkali metal in the alkali metal silicate, thereby forming a hydrogel;

b) contacting the hydrogel with an aqueous solution of an alkaline earth metal salt to incorporate at least a portion of the alkaline earth metal into the hydrogel;

c) aging the hydrogel;

d) washing the hydrogel with water; and

e) drying the hydrogel to form a xerogel;

wherein the silica xerogel comprises between 0.2 and 1.0 mmol/g of a metal component comprising at least 0.2 mmol/g but less than 1.0 mmol/g of the alkali metal and correspondingly no more than 0.8 mmol/g but more than 0 mmol/g of the alkaline earth metal, the xerogel having a pH between 8.0 and 10.5.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein a molar ratio of the alkali metal to the alkaline earth metal in the metal component is between about 5:95 and about 95:5.

29. The method of claim 27, wherein a molar ratio of the alkali metal to the alkaline earth metal in the metal component is between about 30:70 and about 70:30.

30. The method of claim 27, further comprising a step of:

f) calcining the xerogel.